

EZRA

INTRODUCTION

Ezra is the writer of this book. He is one of the characters who has not received proper recognition. He was a descendant of Hilkiah, the high priest ([Ezra 7:1](#)), who found a copy of the Law during the reign of Josiah ([2Chron. 34:14](#)).

Ezra, as a priest, was unable to serve during the Captivity. There was no temple. It had been destroyed. He did, however, give his time to a study of the Word of God. [Ezra 7:6](#) tells us that he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses."

Ezra was also a great revivalist and reformer. The revival began with the reading of the Word of God by Ezra. We will see that in [Nehemiah 8](#). Also, Ezra was probably the writer of 1 and 2 Chronicles and [Psalm 119](#) (the longest chapter in the Bible).

Ezra organized the synagogue. He was the founder of the order of scribes. He helped settle the canon of Scripture and arranged the Psalms. Let us pay tribute to Ezra who was the first to begin a revival of Bible study. Is this not God's program for revival?

We have had no real revival in our day. Dwight L. Moody made this statement (and he saw a revival), "The next revival will be a revival of Bible study." Those who have tried to whip up revivals by organization, by methods, and by gimmicks have failed. Revival will come only as people come back to the Word of God.

The theme of the Book of Ezra is The Word of the Lord. There are ten direct references to God's Word in this little book: [Ezra 1:1](#); [Ezra 3:2](#); [Ezra 6:14, 18](#); [Ezra 7:6, 10, 14](#); [Ezra 9:4](#); [Ezra 10:3, 5](#). The place of the Word of God is seen in the total lives of these people: religious, social, business, and political.

The key to this book is found in [Ezra 9:4](#) and [Ezra 10:3](#): they "trembled at the words of the God of Israel."

Dr. James M. Gray made this statement concerning the Book of Ezra: "We already have seen that the Babylonian captivity did not bring the Jews to national repentance and so lead to national restoration. As the reading of Ezra will disclose, when Cyrus, king of Persia, gave permission to the captives to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, scarcely fifty thousand Jews availed themselves of the privilege, a considerable portion of whom were priests and Levites of the humbler and poorer class."

The Book of Ezra is the last of the historical books, but they do not follow ad seriatum (one right after the other).

When we conclude 2 Chronicles, we see that the southern kingdom of Judah went into captivity for seventy years. We do not hear a word from them after they were captured until Ezra picks up their history. There are three historical books that are called "postcaptivity" books: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Also there are three prophetic "postcaptivity" books: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Now Ezra and Nehemiah belong together. Ezra was a priest and Nehemiah was a layman. They worked together in such a way that God's will was accomplished in Jerusalem. Together they were instrumental in seeing that the walls, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were rebuilt.

Haggai and Zechariah also worked together. They encouraged the people to build the temple. Haggai was a practical man, as we shall see when we get to his book. The reconstruction and refurbishing of the temple were his supreme passion. He was as simple and factual as $2+2=4$. He was neither romantic nor poetic, but he sure was practical. Zechariah, on the other hand, was a dreamer. Haggai had his feet on the ground and Zechariah had his head in the clouds. For example, Zechariah saw a woman going through the air in a bushel basket. My friend, that is poetical! Haggai would never have seen that. But the interesting thing is that Zechariah would never have concerned himself about the measurements of the temple and that you must have doors in it and a foundation under it. Haggai and Zechariah went together just like Ezra and Nehemiah. The practical man and the poet must walk together; God arranged it that way.

The Books of Haggai and Zechariah should be read and studied with the Book of Ezra, for all three books were written in the shadow of the rebuilt temple, and were given to encourage the people in building. "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of God of Israel, even unto them" ([Ezra 5:1](#)).

In the Book of Ezra there are two major divisions. There is the return of the captives from Babylon led by Zerubbabel in the first six chapters. About fifty thousand returned. Then there is the return led by Ezra in chapters 7 -- 10, and about two thousand people followed Ezra.

Outline

I. Return from Babylon Led by Zerubbabel, [Ezra 1](#) through [Ezra 6](#) (About 50,00 returned)

- A. Restoration of Temple by Decree of Cyrus, [Ezra 1](#)
- B. Return under Zerubbabel, [Ezra 2](#)
- C. Rebuilding of Temple, [Ezra 3](#)
- D. Retardation of Rebuilding by Opposition, [Ezra 4](#)
(Decree of Artaxerxes)
- E. Renewal of Rebuilding of Temple, [Ezra 5](#) through [Ezra 6](#)
(Decree of Darius)

II. Return from Babylon Led by Ezra, [Ezra 7](#) through [Ezra 10](#) (About 2,000 returned)

- A. Return under Ezra, [Ezra 7](#) through [Ezra 8](#)
- B. Reformation under Ezra, [Ezra 9](#) through [Ezra 10](#)

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Chapter 1

THEME: Decree and return of a remnant to Jerusalem

Decree Of Cyrus For The Temple Restoration (1:1-11)

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdoms, and put it also in writing, saying [[Ezra 1:1](#)].

Notice that right away Ezra puts an emphasis upon the Word of God.

Also, Cyrus, king of Persia, is mentioned. He was one of the most enlightened rulers of the ancient world. He was a subject of predictive prophecy. He was named before he was born -- almost two hundred years before his coming as king of Persia. [Isaiah 44:28](#) says, "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." [Isaiah 45:1](#) continues, "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut."

Cyrus is a type of Christ. Daniel was a prime minister in the court of Cyrus and evidently led him to a knowledge of the living and true God. Cyrus knew what he was doing when he made a decree proclaiming that the nation of Israel could return to their land. We are told that the will of the Lord was fulfilled in that act. Here is prophecy that was indeed fulfilled.

It was during the reign of Cyrus that Daniel gave some of his greatest prophecies, including the seventy weeks prophecy concerning Israel.

At least one-fourth of the Bible, when it was initially given, was prophetic. A large portion of it has already been fulfilled. [Ezra 1:1](#) is one of those portions of Scripture that has been fulfilled. Over three hundred prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ have been literally fulfilled. There are those who say there are also over three hundred prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ, although I have never checked that out.

The birth of Christ was predicted in the Old Testament, and four things were said in connection with it:

1. He was to be born in Bethlehem ([Mic. 5:2](#)).
2. He was to be called a Nazarene (Jud. 13:5).
3. He was to be called out of Egypt ([Hos. 11:1](#)).
4. There would be weeping in Ramah, a little town near Jerusalem ([Jer. 31:15](#)). Matthew fits all of these pieces together and gives us the Christmas story. Fulfilled prophecy is what [Matthew 2](#) is all about.

[Ezra 1:1](#) is also fulfilled prophecy. The seventy years of captivity were over, the decree was given, and the children of Israel could return to their land. Very few returned, however.

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah [[Ezra 1:2](#)].

The decree of Cyrus is very important. In the first place, Cyrus said that he had been given all the kingdoms of the earth. I can hear someone asking, "What about the United States of America?" May I say that the United States was not a very interesting place in that day. It was not a kingdom. Cyrus was talking about the kingdoms that existed during his day. Cyrus was the kingpin; "The LORD God of heaven hath given me" -- he was the man at the top.

He realized that God had given him his position. I wonder today how many of the rulers of this world, in this so-called civilized age, recognize that they are ministers of God? They have been put into office by God whether they know it or not!

Now I want you to notice the expression, "The LORD God of heaven." It is a designation of God which is peculiar to Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. This expression does not occur before we come to these books. You see, after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Jerusalem God could no longer be identified with the temple as the One who dwelt between the cherubim. The glory had departed; "Ichabod" was written over the escutcheon of Israel. Ezekiel had the vision of the departure of the Shekinah glory. For this reason in the postcaptivity books He is "the LORD God of heaven."

Ezekiel saw the vision of God's glory departing from the temple at Jerusalem. It lifted from the temple and paused to see if the people of God would return to Him and turn away from their idolatry. They did not. It went over the city and the city walls and paused again. But the people did not turn to God. Then the Shekinah glory lifted to the top of the Mount of Olives and waited again. But there was no turning to God. So the glory was caught up to heaven and was not seen again.

One day there walked into the temple One who made a whip of cords, and He cleansed that temple ([John 2](#)). Although the Shekinah glory was not visible -- He was veiled in human flesh -- He was God. He had laid aside His glory when He came to earth, but He was very God of very God and He was very man of very man. Because His glory was veiled, He was rejected and crucified. Although man crucified Him, He is a king. In the Gospel of Matthew He was born a king, He lived like a king, He performed miracles as a king, He taught as a king, He was arrested as a king, tried as a king, and He died as a king. He was buried as a king. He arose as a king and went back to heaven as a king. He is coming again someday as a king. He is ". . . the King of kings and Lord of lords . . ." ([1Tim. 6:15](#)). Today He is the Lord God of heaven. Don't go to Bethlehem to look for Him. He is in heaven. He is at God's right hand.

When the Shekinah glory was removed from the earth, God gave His people into the hands of the Gentiles and sent them into Babylonian captivity. He dissolved the theocracy of Israel and became the God of heaven. He is still that to His ancient people, and He will remain that until He returns to Jerusalem to establish His throne again as the Lord of the whole earth. Jerusalem will then be the city of the great King.

Now going back to the second verse of the Book of Ezra, notice that Cyrus very definitely said, "He hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem." The word charged means that God had "commanded" him to do this. This is remarkable when we remember that Cyrus was a Gentile world ruler at this time! Apparently Cyrus, through the ministry of Daniel the prophet, came to a knowledge of the living and true God.

Cyrus now gives permission for the Jews who had been in Babylonian captivity to return to Jerusalem.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem [[Ezra 1:3](#)].

You'll notice that God has commanded Cyrus to do this, but Cyrus did not command the people to go to Jerusalem; he granted them permission to go up.

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem [[Ezra 1:4](#)].

Permission was granted to the people to return. Those who did not choose to return were to make an offering of gold and silver and other things of value that would assist those returning to execute this command to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem.

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered [[Ezra 1:5-6](#)].

As I have indicated before, there was actually a very small percentage of the people who went up. I don't want to sit in judgment on them because they may have had a very good excuse for not going up. But, apparently, it was God's will for them to go up and some did not choose to go. They had settled down in Babylon. I am of the opinion many of them were settled and enjoying the comfort and affluent society of Babylon. Many of them had become prosperous, and so they chose not to go up. They at least felt that it was not God's will or the time for them to go up. It's not, therefore, for me to say that these people are out of the will of God. I do know that later on, when we get to the Book of Esther, we'll see the story of those who remained in the land; and it's not a very pretty story. At that time they were definitely out of the will of God. One thing that can be said in their favor is that there was, apparently, no spirit of enmity or of judgment between the two groups -- those who returned and those who did not. Those who remained helped their brethren who went up. They provided the things that they needed.

This has an application and is quite interesting to me. I do not feel that everyone is called today to go as a foreign missionary. I'm confident I was never called to leave my land and to go to foreign people. And I can be very frank and tell you why God didn't call me to

go. I said to a friend of mine, when we were visiting a mission field down in Mexico, and I said it again in South America when I was down there, "I can very easily see why God did not call me. I do not mean to be crude, but I do not have the intestinal fortitude to have stayed down here!" I don't think I could have endured the slow pace. I like to see action, and you don't see that on the mission field -- things move slowly. God has some wonderful people on the mission field! However, because God didn't call me doesn't mean we're not to support those He did call. We should support those who are doing a good job and back them up with our prayers and our encouragement. This goes for those who are out on the front lines in this country giving out the Word of God. In warfare it is estimated that for every soldier out on the fighting front there have to be ten people behind him getting supplies to him -- food, clothing, medical care, and ammunition. This is true in God's army today.

Now in Ezra's day the people who did not return felt a responsibility to become partners with their brethren who went back to Jerusalem. The group that returned was of the poorer class. There were "the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites." They were humble folk. The psalmist says, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" ([Ps. 25:9](#)). These are the ones who had the understanding of the times, and so they returned to their land.

Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods [[Ezra 1:7](#)].

How did Cyrus get "the vessels of the house of the LORD"? Well they were being used -- desecrated -- at Belshazzar's drunken feast the night that Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians. Daniel records this: "Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" ([Dan. 5:2-4](#)). That very night the city of Babylon was captured. The Persian kings had put away these vessels, and when Cyrus became king, they were there -- God saw to this. Now these holy vessels ("holy" in the sense that they were for the use of God) are put back in the hands of the priests and Levites who are returning to Jerusalem.

Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah [[Ezra 1:8](#)].

As they were officially delivered to the Jews, we are given some details concerning them.

And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem [[Ezra 1:9-11](#)].

They represent tremendous wealth. These are sent back to Jerusalem.

Chapter 2

Return Under Zerubbabel (2:1-65)

Chapter 2 gives a list of those who returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city;

Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel [[Ezra 2:1-2](#)].

To attempt to read this list would be a real exercise in pronunciation. Hebrew names were difficult enough to pronounce before the Captivity. Then after the Captivity they really became difficult because there was the inclusion of that which was of the Persian and Babylonian languages.

Notice that in [verse 2](#) a man named Nehemiah is mentioned. This is not the Nehemiah that wrote the book of the Bible bearing that name. Nehemiah, the writer, did not return to the land with the first group. Also a man named Mordecai is mentioned. He is not the same man who is mentioned in the Book of Esther.

As we read down the list, we see some very interesting names. For instance the "men of Anathoth."

The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight [[Ezra 2:23](#)].

That is quite a group from that little town who went back. I have seen this little town, and it is a place of interest because it is the town where Jeremiah purchased a field. You will remember that in Jeremiah's day the children of Israel were on the verge of being carried away into captivity. I would not call his purchase of some land at that time a good investment in real estate, would you? When Jeremiah bought this land, it did not look as though Israel had a future. But God had him buy the land as a sign that Judah would be restored. Jeremiah's act was one of faith. God promised that His people would return to the land, and they did. These men of Anathoth had a sealed, lawful claim to the land because Jeremiah had purchased it and given it to them. They were going back to claim their possessions. You can read the story in [Jeremiah 32](#).

There are many very beautiful spiritual lessons for us in this section. We can be partners in this enterprise -- some rebuild the temple, some give out the Word of God, some go as missionaries, some support those who go. And something that is quite wonderful is that

someday we are to be rewarded. Every man's work will be inspected with a reward in mind. We all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Every believer will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" ([2Cor. 5:10](#)). Added to that, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" ([1Cor. 3:13-15](#)). When I was in Corinth, I had pictures taken of me standing on the bema. Nobody judged me then; neither did I receive a reward. But one of these days I am going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. I don't want Him to blame me. I don't want Him to say that everything I did was wood, hay, and stubble. I don't want my labors to go up in smoke. I want there to be a little gold among my works.

The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight [[Ezra 2:41](#)].

There were 128 singers who went back to the land. The spirit of praise and rejoicing was in their hearts and lives. They had a lot to sing about. Interestingly enough, more singers returned to the land than did Levites ([Ezra 2:40](#)).

And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name:

These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood [[Ezra 2:61-62](#)].

Three families of the priests could not prove their relationship to the nation through genealogical records. Because they could not declare their pedigree, they were officially excluded. However, they were permitted to go with the Jews on their trip to the land.

Today the child of God ought to know that he is a son of God. The apostle Paul could say, "I know whom I have believed." We should have a "know-so" salvation, my friend -- not a "think-so" or "hope-so." ". . . for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" ([2Tim. 1:12](#)).

The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were sven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women [[Ezra 2:64-65](#)].

This passage of Scripture gives us the total number of people who returned to the land at this time under Zerubbabel:

Total congregation 42,360

Servants and maids 7,337
Singers (male and female) 200
Grand Total 49,897

CHAPTERS 3 AND 4

Chapter 3

THEME: Temple rebuilding begun and halted

This first group that returned to Jerusalem after the Captivity numbered only about fifty thousand. In the next delegation, led by Ezra, only about two thousand returned. There were others who came, which may have swelled the population to about sixty thousand -- yet there were several million Israelites at this time. You can see that the great majority remained in the land of Babylon and in the other areas rather than return to the Promised Land.

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem [[Ezra 3:1](#)].

Obviously there is a time lapse between chapters 2 and 3 of Ezra. [Ezra 2](#) concluded with the children of Israel returning to the land. They took an abundance of wealth with them to rebuild the temple and restore the land. During the lapse of time they built homes, because we find later that Haggai rebuked them for building their homes and neglecting the temple. The elapsed time could have been several weeks, several months, or as much as two years.

Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God [[Ezra 3:2](#)].

The thing that most interests me is that they searched the Scriptures and they found what was written in the Law of Moses. When they found what was written, there was no controversy or difference of opinion. They not only returned to the land, they also returned to the Law of Moses. The Bible was their authority; therefore neither the ideas nor the opinions of individuals entered into their decisions. Things were not done for the sake of expediency.

There is an application here for us. What men say and think is not important. The Scriptures are all-sufficient and contain all the instruction that is needed for the guidance of those who would be faithful to God in any particular period of church history.

This is the reason I do not give talks on methods, or psychology, or sex. I preach and teach the Word of God. We need to look at the total Word of God, not just one or two familiar well-worn passages. I thank God for those familiar passages, but I think some of them have been worn out at the expense of other sections of the Word of God. When we look at the total Word of God, we won't need a book on how to be happy though married

and books like that which are going around. The Word of God has the answers. Why not go back to the source?

And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening [[Ezra 3:3](#)].

The altar erected was the altar of burnt offerings. This altar, as we have already seen, speaks of the Cross of Christ. The burnt sacrifice that was offered speaks of the person of Christ and His sacrifice for us. Christ offered Himself without spot to God. He died in the sinner's stead. What they were doing when they offered this sacrifice was meeting about the person of Christ and His atoning death. That is the place of meeting today for believers.

Every believer should understand that those who have trusted Christ as Savior and have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of believers (the church) are brothers. My brother is one with whom I can have fellowship. Fellowship is not a question of the color of a person's skin, or of his social status, or of his wealth. Fellowship has nothing to do with the fact that a person is a Baptist, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Nazarene, a Pentecostal, or a Roman Catholic. None of that makes any difference. Is he a believer in Jesus Christ? That is the important thing. If a person is a child of God, he and I can meet together and have fellowship. This is a very wonderful thing.

In these folk who had returned from captivity we find a marvelous unity -- which should characterize all the children of God. The psalmist said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" ([Ps. 133:1](#)). These people who had come back to the land were poor, humble folk. They were not seeking position; they were just trying to do the will of God.

You and I are living at the end of an age, and it is becoming to those who really have an understanding of the times to be through with pretension. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" ([Ps. 25:9](#)). We need to be meek. In our churches and other organizations we are always trying to do something big. Oh, my friend, we don't need to do that. What we need is to meet around the person of Jesus Christ, as this returning remnant was doing.

They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD [[Ezra 3:4-5](#)].

These folk have returned to the Word of God. They have put the altar, and now they begin to build the foundations of the temple.

Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of

Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel [[Ezra 3:8-10](#)].

So far these people have only built an altar and laid the foundation for the temple, but they are so thrilled and enthusiastic that they act as though the entire temple has been rebuilt. They had a dedication service, a time of praise, and sang praises to God. It was a thrilling experience for them.

If you are as old as I am, you can remember back in the 1920s when many churches were able to complete only the basements of their buildings. They would buy a lot, build a basement, cover the basement with tar paper, and that is where the congregation would meet. Then the Depression came, and many of those churches were never finished. The congregations continued to meet in the basements with the tar-paper roofs. These have largely disappeared today because in our affluent society we must have the very latest thing in modern architecture; we would never be satisfied with a basement.

However, these Jews were delighted and thrilled with the foundation they had built. So they held a praise service.

And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid [[Ezra 3:11](#)].

Now these were the younger folk who had never seen Solomon's temple.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off [[Ezra 3:12-13](#)].

There were two groups present during the dedication service. There were the young people who had never seen the temple of old. This was something new to them. In all their youth and enthusiasm they were praising God, and the Lord blessed them. The other

group was composed of the old-timers. They remembered Solomon's temple and how beautiful it was. I have a notion that some of them said to each other, "This second temple is nothing. If these young people could only have seen Solomon's temple!" What they were saying was not very encouraging to the young group, but it was true. One of the problems God had to overcome was discouragement that came because of the older group talking the way they did. As a result we find that Haggai the prophet told the people, "The Lord says, 'Go ahead and build.' God is with you. He was not in that beautiful temple of Solomon's at the end -- the glory had left it -- but God is with you now. Go ahead and build!"

There are a lot of old-timers today who discourage the work of God. I feel that one of the reasons that this present spiritual movement is largely outside the church today is because many old-timers are holding back. They only remember the old days, and they are not about to enter the new days. There is a danger of sitting in judgment upon this spiritual movement of today. I find myself critical of many facets of the program, and I am an old-timer. But let's withhold judgment for a time. Let's see what is going to happen. The Lord knows those who belong to Him. He is going to separate the wheat and the tares. That is His business, not ours. Let us thank God that there is a movement toward God today and rejoice in it. Let us not weep and criticize in this present hour.

I recall that when I was a student in seminary I was asked to hold some summertime meetings in Georgia. In those days it was customary to hold meetings, which they sometimes called protracted meetings. They asked me to preach, and I did. In spite of the preacher, the Lord blessed and people were saved.

I will never forget the last night of a particular meeting. Some of the young officers of the church were rejoicing with me at the way things had gone. An old-timer was sitting there listening to us. He had long whiskers, and he looked to me like Father Time. Finally he said, "You boys had a pretty good meeting, but I remember when. . . ." Then we heard all about "when." When he got through with his tales of the past, our meeting did not seem like anything at all. That was very discouraging; we all left a little depressed that night. Later I asked another member of the church who was almost as old as "Father Time" and she said, "The meeting he told you about wasn't all that great. You know, he is in his dotage, and the older he gets the bigger that meeting gets. It wasn't nearly as wonderful as he thought it was."

Chapter 4

Artaxerxes' Decree Halts Rebuilding (4:1-24)

Opposition to the rebuilding program did not come from the inside but from the outside. This is a rather detailed section, and I am not going to spend much time in it except to call attention to what is taking place.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye

do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither [[Ezra 4:1-2](#)].

I will have occasion later on to call attention to the fact that not only two tribes returned to the land (Judah and Benjamin), but all twelve tribes actually went back. These people are saying that they returned to the Promised Land during the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assur (Assyria). It was Assyria, you remember, which had taken the northern tribes captive. Some of these people apparently had trickled back into the land and had mixed with the Samaritans. As a result they wanted to join up with those who had come from Babylon. The enemies' first effort to hinder the work of rebuilding the temple is to offer to become allies.

That has always been the subtlety of Satan in his work through the liberal wing of the church. Liberalism divided the church and then said, "You fundamentalists are always fighting. Join with us." Because we did not join with them, they call us the troublemakers. Liberalism split the church in the beginning, and now they want us to come back on their terms.

Here the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" said, "We have been worshiping God here all along, and you folk have just gotten back. Let us join with you, and we'll worship Him together." That sounds very good on the surface, but they were not genuine, as we shall see.

But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us [[Ezra 4:3](#)].

The chief fathers of Israel were not very nice, were they? They absolutely rejected the enemies' offer to become allies. The Israelites do not seem to be interested in the ecumenical movement at all. In fact, they seem actually rude. But the very interesting thing is that they were right. The important thing is to be right. When the psychological approach comes in conflict with the Bible, the Bible must prevail for the child of God.

Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia [[Ezra 4:4-5](#)].

Now we can see that they were enemies, not friends. As soon as they were turned down, they began to actively oppose them.

And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue [[Ezra 4:7](#)].

They decided to compose a letter to the king of Persia with false accusations against the remnant that had returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

Here is a copy of the letter they sent:

This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings [[Ezra 4:11-13](#)].

Their argument is that Jerusalem was a rebellious city and that Artaxerxes will have trouble with it again if he allows the city to be rebuilt.

So the king of Persia took their advice. He searched the records to see if their accusation was accurate. In his letter of reply, he said:

And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.

Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? [[Ezra 4:19-22](#)].

When this letter comes back from the king of Persia, the so-called friends who wanted to cooperate with the building program hurriedly bring the letter to the building site.

Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia [[Ezra 4:23-24](#)].

They were forced to halt the building program.

CHAPTERS 5 AND 6

Chapter 5

THEME: Temple rebuilt, finished, and dedicated

We have seen already that the rebuilding of the temple was stopped by the opposition of the enemy. They wrote a letter to Artaxerxes which gave a false impression of Jerusalem. They called it a rebellious and bad city. The king Artaxerxes did go back in the records and find out there had been a rebellion on the part of these people, at the very end of the kingdom -- the southern kingdom of Judah. Three times they had rebelled. And finally Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the city. But they did not investigate thoroughly. Although they found the rebellion to be true, they did not look for the decree that had been made to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

This was a period of great discouragement. They not only stopped building; they were also tempted to walk away from the entire project. They felt this would be the best way to solve their problems.

There are many people who feel that if they could just change their location they could solve their problems. That is not always true. You cannot run away from your problems. Fortunately, this time the people did not run away. God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Candidly, we ought to study the Books of Haggai and Zechariah (also Daniel and Esther) in connection with Ezra and Nehemiah. They belong in the same passage, and studying them together would be very profitable.

Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them [[Ezra 5:1](#)].

These two prophets were called upon by God to encourage the people to resume rebuilding the temple. They knew, of course, that there had been a decree from Cyrus, king of Persia, which granted them permission to rebuild Jerusalem. And they knew it was God's will and God's time to rebuild the city. Haggai called them the Lord's messengers.

These two men were not alike. The only thing they had in common was that they were both prophets of God. Haggai had his feet on the ground. He was a solid, stable individual. He was a man upon whom you could rest. He wanted the facts. He carried a measuring rod along with him and measured everything. Everything had to be all wool, a yard wide, and warranted not to rip, tear, unravel, or become run down at the heel. That was Haggai. He got right down to the nitty-gritty. He spoke, we would say today, to the conscience of the nation. His messages were ones that went deep and hurt. His type was not popular -- nor is it popular today.

Zechariah was an entirely different type of individual. He had his head in the clouds. He had tremendous visions and a message to match. He appealed to the emotions of the people. He spoke to their hearts. These two men together, Haggai and Zechariah, spoke to the conscience and heart of Israel. Apparently Haggai was considered the leader, but both of them encouraged the people to resume their building program. It would be very profitable at this juncture to read the Books of Haggai and Zechariah.

Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? [[Ezra 5:2-3](#)].

When work was resumed, their enemies heard about it. We are told that Tatnai was a Persian governor of Samaria, and Shethar-Boznai was probably a high official. They come and challenge the workmen. They say, "What's the big idea? You were ordered to stop building!"

Now the answer they give them is really not an answer at all. To begin with, Tatnai and his crowd are enemies. They are men of the world, and the Jews are not about to cast their pearls before swine. Would they understand if they said that God told them to build? After all, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him . . ." ([Ps. 25:14](#)) -- and with no one else. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him . . ." ([1Cor. 2:14](#)). They just answered ". . . a fool according to his folly . . ." ([Prov. 26:4](#)). In fact, they answered by asking a question.

Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? [[Ezra 5:4](#)].

In other words, "We didn't see your names on the list that was given to us. If you were part and parcel of this, if you were part of the building crew, we would be glad to answer you. But since your names are not on the list, we will not answer you." I would call that a very nice way of saying, "it's none of your business. You have no right to ask that question of us."

Now that kind of reply could put these builders in a very difficult position, but notice what happens.

But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter [[Ezra 5:5](#)].

The wonderful thing is that you can depend on God to keep His eye on those who are His own. So off goes another letter to the king -- by this time Darius is the king. Apparently about seven years had gone by.

The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king:

They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace [[Ezra 5:6-7](#)].

This is another letter the enemy gets off posthaste -- I think he sends it special delivery.

Be it known unto the king, that we went into the providence of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands [[Ezra 5:8](#)].

As you can see, the thought in the letter is this: We didn't go up there specifically to spy this out -- we are really not their enemies -- we just happened to be in the neighborhood and stopped by for a little visit. And this is what we found.

Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them [[Ezra 5:9-10](#)].

They were not told the names of the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah.

And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up [[Ezra 5:11](#)].

They give them the history of the Captivity, which had occurred about seventy years before.

But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God [[Ezra 5:12-13](#)].

They gave them concrete evidence that King Cyrus had commanded them to rebuild the temple -- he even sent the temple vessels back with them.

And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;

And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place [[Ezra 5:14-15](#)].

The letter concludes with this request:

Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter [[Ezra 5:17](#)].

These enemies did not believe that a decree had ever been made by Cyrus, but the letter is saying that the Jews' claim of such a decree is the basis on which they are rebuilding. So they ask that a search be made. They are certain that no such decree exists, but that these people are doing this on their own.

Chapter 6

Cyrus' Decree Confirmed (6:1-14)

A great deal has been made concerning the position and the condition of God's people. These two things are quite different, by the way. Positionally, the Jews were in the place God wanted them to be -- in the land. The decree for them to return to the land was made by Cyrus, who acknowledged that he was doing it at the command of God. So these people are in the position God wanted them to be in. However, their condition is not so good. They are discouraged. They would like to walk away from the whole business. So God raised up prophets to encourage them.

It seems that God's people today tend to get their position and condition mixed up. If you are in Christ today, you are safe. Your position is good. But how is your condition? Are you a discouraged saint? Are you anchored in Christ with a sure salvation, but you want to give up and quit? Do you want to walk away from it all? If that is how you feel, my friend, although your position is good, your condition is bad. That was the state of the Jews in the Book of Ezra.

Now the very interesting thing is that God is with His people, and His will is going to be done. We find now that a discovery was made. This is a case of the enemy getting his foot in his mouth. He should have kept quiet. Notice what happened.

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon [[Ezra 6:1](#)].

They went down in a basement somewhere and dug up old archives which were covered with dust --

And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits [[Ezra 6:2-3](#)].

Also --

And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God [[Ezra 6:5](#)].

It was all recorded there. All of this is unearthed by King Darius. He never would have known about this decree if the enemy had not mentioned it. This was a real blunder on the part of the enemies of the Jews.

Now this is the message that King Darius returns to Tatnai:

Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Aphar-sachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place [[Ezra 6:6-7](#)].

Tatnai was a governor with an important job, and he thought he could stop the building of the temple in Jerusalem. But when the decree of Cyrus was located, the present King Darius realizes that it was a law of the Medes and Persians, and it could not be altered or changed. So he makes a further decree.

Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered [[Ezra 6:8](#)].

He says, "Now, look, not only are you to stop hindering the work, you are to help it along. You are to keep the taxes that you gather over there on that side of the river -- instead of sending them over here to Persia -- you are to give the money to these folk for the rebuilding of the temple." God does make the wrath of man to praise Him!

And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons [[Ezra 6:9-10](#)].

What a decree this was!

Also, he decrees a severe penalty upon anyone who would hinder the work.

Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this [[Ezra 6:11](#)].

At this point you would find it thrilling to read the Books of Haggai and Zechariah. They are marvelous. We designate them as minor prophets, but they are batting in the major leagues!

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia [[Ezra 6:14](#)].

The temple is rebuilt under the inspiration of Haggai and Zechariah.

Temple Finished And Dedicated (6:15-17)

And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy [[Ezra 6:15-16](#)].

Notice that it says, "the children of Israel . . . and the rest of the children of the captivity." Who is meant? Of course it means what it says: the children of Israel -- not only the children of Judah and Benjamin. These folk are of the ten tribes of Israel, which some people today call the ten lost tribes. My friend, they didn't get lost. They are here with their brethren keeping "the dedication of this house of God with joy."

And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel [[Ezra 6:17](#)].

For whom was the sin offering? The language here is even more explicit. it was for "all Israel." Did only people from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin return to the land? No! There were people from all twelve tribes. There were "twelve he goats," according to the number of the tribes of Israel. Now don't tell me that ten tribes got lost and ended up in Great Britain, and a few of them came to America on the Mayflower. That simply is not true. The record here is quite clear that none of the tribes were lost. If any of them are lost, they are all lost because they were all together after the Captivity. This will be confirmed again later on.

Passover Kept (6:19-22)

And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,

And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel [[Ezra 6:19-22](#)].

Just five weeks after the dedication of the temple the Passover was held. The Passover spoke of the death of Christ, our Passover who was offered for us. When they gathered around the Passover, they were gathering around the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Word of God.

CHAPTERS 7 AND 8

Chapter 7

THEME: Return under Ezra

Now we come to the second major division in the little Book of Ezra. The first six chapters told us about the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel -- about fifty thousand Jews left Babylon at that time. The Jews had gone into the Babylonian captivity because they continually turned to idolatry, and God gave them a gold cure in Babylon. Also the Jews had disobeyed the Mosaic Law in that they had not allowed the land to lie fallow every seventh year. They probably did not think it was too important. They thought they were getting by with breaking that law, but God said, "I'm going to put you out of the land for seventy years so that the land can catch up on the Sabbaths it has missed." After the land had rested and renewed itself for seventy years, God allowed His people to return.

Then there was another wave of revival among the Jews who had been captives and were still living in Babylon. Ezra led a second group back to Jerusalem. Up to this point Ezra, although he is the writer of this book, has not figured in its history at all. In the final four chapters we meet the author. In chapters 7 and 8 we see the return of the Jews led by Ezra. In chapters 9 and 10 we see the reformation under Ezra. Revival led to reformation, and that is always the order. We will see that again when we study Nehemiah.

Ezra is one of the neglected characters of the Bible. I do not believe he has received proper recognition by Bible expositors, and certainly not from the church. I wonder if you have ever heard a sermon on the Book of Ezra. Have you ever heard this book taught? Well, it is one that is easily passed by. In the next few chapters we are going to meet Ezra and get acquainted with him.

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia,
Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the
son of Aaron the chief priest [[Ezra 7:1-5](#)].

This is the Artaxerxes who gave Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, which marks the beginning to the great prophecy of the "Seventy Weeks" of Daniel. We will discuss him when we get to the Book of Nehemiah.

The man here who interests me is not the king, but Ezra himself. Who is he? Ezra was a lineal descendant of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. He belongs, therefore, to the priestly line. Had there been a temple in Jerusalem, he probably would have functioned in it as a priest -- probably the high priest. But there was no temple; it had been burned and destroyed.

Apparently Ezra did not feel like returning to Jerusalem with the first delegation. There was no place for him in Jerusalem, and apparently he was ministering to those who remained in Babylon. Now a group of about two thousand Jews, led by Ezra, planned to go to Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt so that there was a place for him to minister. We are going to find that he was also a teacher of the Word of God.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the grandson of Aaron, is mentioned in this passage. He first appears in Scripture at a time of licentious idolatry where his zeal and action stopped the plague that was destroying Israel. You will recall that when Balaam the prophet was not allowed to curse Israel, he taught the king to foster intermarriage with them for the purpose of bringing the world, the flesh, and the devil into the midst of God's people. In [Numbers 25:7-11](#) we are told that one of the Israelites took a Midianitish woman. When Jews married pagan people, they were drawn into the worship of their gods. Judgment fell upon Israel in the form of a plague. Phinehas stayed the plague by executing the man who had taken the Midianitish woman and executing her also. Two lives were sacrificed in order to save a multitude of lives. As a reward for his efforts, God promised Phinehas that the priesthood would remain in his family forever.

I would like to add a practical word which I consider a logical application of this section to our present condition. There are many judges today who feel that capital punishment is brutal, uncivilized, and should be abolished. The original purpose of capital punishment was the protection of other human lives. When a guilty person is not executed for his crime, then hundreds have to pay with their lives. Today we are not safe in our cities because there are no longer executions. Don't tell me that executions do not deter crime. I have discovered that when a traffic officer writes a ticket it will slow me down on a highway -- don't tell me it does not slow you down! It is a deterrent to crime, and that is its purpose. That was the reason the Jew and his Midianitish woman were executed. Because of the death of this couple, multitudes in Israel were saved from the pollution that had broken out in that nation.

I remember hearing a whimsical story about the early days in the West when a man was asked to say something before he was hanged for a murder he had committed. This was the statement he made: "I want you to know that this is going to be a lesson to me." Well, my friend, that was not the purpose of his hanging. It was not to be a lesson to him. It was to protect the men, women, and children who were living in that day. Why don't we face up to the facts in life today? Why can't we see that we are sacrificing hundreds of lives to protect one criminal? God does not do it that way, because He wants to save human life; and He knows how bad the human heart can be. God says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked . . ." ([Jer. 17:9](#)). There is a great lesson to be learned from the action of Phinehas, one of the ancestors of Ezra.

This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the

king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him [[Ezra 7:6](#)].

Ezra "was a ready scribe in the law of Moses." Since he was not able to execute the office of priest, he spent his time studying the Word of God. Now he is going to be able to use what he has learned. You will find out that he is labeled "a ready scribe" again and again. [Ezra 7:21](#) tells us that Ezra had a reputation down in Babylon, even with the king, as being scribe of the words of the Lord God. He was a teacher of the Word of God.

And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king [[Ezra 7:7](#)].

There was another revival among the Jews in Babylon, and this time about two thousand people wanted to return to the land.

And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him [[Ezra 7:8-9](#)].

They returned to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. It took them almost five months to make the trip. They could not go by jet stream; they had to go by foot, and it was a long, arduous trip in that day.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments [[Ezra 7:10](#)].

Ezra had prepared his heart for the day that he would return to his land. He knew it was coming because he had faith in God. So he prepared his heart and studied the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible) and the Book of Joshua, which were in existence in that day. It is the belief of many that Ezra wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra not only studied God's Word, he also did what it said. Oh, my, that is so important! It is one thing to study God's Word and another thing to do it. Ezra also wanted to teach the Word. He wanted God's people to know God's statutes and judgments.

Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time.

I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee [[Ezra 7:11-13](#)].

Artaxerxes made a decree which allowed Ezra and his followers to return to their land. It was not a commandment that they go, but it was permission to return according to their own particular desires and according to the leading of the Lord.

Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand;

And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem [[Ezra 7:14-15](#)].

Evidently Ezra had a real witness in the court, because the king and his counselors made this offering to "the God of Israel." Ezra was given the authority to appoint magistrates and judges. They got together all of this material, Ezra was given the king's decree, then preparation was made for them to leave. The decree reveals a tremendous reverence for God. Notice how it concludes:

And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment [[Ezra 7:26](#)].

This law, of course, was in reference to the Jews after they arrived in the land. In other words, if they return to their land, they must mean business as far as their relationship to God is concerned.

Notice now the thanksgiving of Ezra.

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem [[Ezra 7:27](#)].

Not only was the temple to be rebuilt, it was also to be beautified. I think God's house ought to be made beautiful, as beautiful as it can possibly be according to the ability of the folk who are identified with it.

And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me [[Ezra 7:28](#)].

Ezra led a fine delegation back to the land. It was not as large as the first delegation, but a great many of the leaders were in the second group.

Chapter 8

Return Under Ezra (continued) (8:21-35)

Chapter 8 gives the list of Ezra's companions. Notice that Ezra made sure that the Levites went with them. The Nethinims, who were the servants, went along also.

Then we see something that reveals how human Ezra was.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance [[Ezra 8:21](#)].

Ezra calls for a fast and a great prayer meeting at the river of Ahava. He wanted to know God's will.

For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us [[Ezra 8:22-23](#)].

He said, "You know, I went before the king and told him that the hand of our God was with us, that He will be against our enemies and will lead us back to our land." Then Ezra looked at the delegation gathered by the river ready to go on that long march. He looked at the families and the little ones, and he knew the dangers along the way. The normal thing would be to ask the king for a little help -- for a few guards to ride along with them. Then the king would say, "I thought you were trusting the Lord."

Sometimes some of us become very eloquent about how we are trusting God and how wonderful He is, but when we get right down to the nitty-gritty, we don't really trust Him. Ezra is that kind of an individual. He surely is human. He says, "I was ashamed to go ask the king." What was the alternative? He called a prayer meeting and a fast. He said, "Oh, Lord, we just have to depend on You." You know, the Lord puts many of us in that position many, many times.

Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days [[Ezra 8:31-32](#)].

We find that the king sent a great deal of gold, silver, and vessels with this delegation. This wealth was put in the care of the priests, and they needed protection, you see. And God did watch over them, and they arrived safely at their destination. They stayed in Jerusalem three days and took the treasure into the temple -- into the house of God.

Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord [[Ezra 8:35](#)].

In this verse twelve "he goats" are mentioned again. Why? It was for all Israel for a sin offering. What a wonderful, glorious thing it was for these Jews to be back in Jerusalem offering their sacrifices to God!

CHAPTERS 9 AND 10

Chapter 9

THEME: Revival under Ezra

In chapter 9 we come to one of the great prayers of the Bible. In three of the postcaptivity books there are three great ninth chapters which record prayers: [Ezra 9](#), [Nehemiah 9](#), and [Daniel 9](#). Now here before us is the great prayer of Ezra. The occasion for it was a very sad thing which had taken place among God's people.

Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites [[Ezra 9:1](#)].

Note that the Egyptians are mentioned and so are other pagan peoples. The Hittites were a great people. Information on the Hittite nation was discovered after I was in school, and I have been interested in reading about them. Throughout Asia Minor, especially along the coast, great cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Troy were first established by the Hittites. They were indeed a great people, but they were heathen. The people of Israel had not separated themselves from these folk.

When the first delegation of Jews returned to the land, they met discouragement. We will learn more about this when we come to the prophecy of Haggai. We will see how he helped them overcome the hurdles of discouragement that were before them. Believe me, they ran a long line of hurdles, and through Haggai they were able to clear them. With the help of Nehemiah, the active layman, the walls and temple of Jerusalem were rebuilt; but there was discouragement on every hand. It is at times like this that you let down. It has happened to many Christians.

Someone has said that discouragement is the devil's greatest weapons. The Jews let down their guard and intermarried with the surrounding heathen and enemies of God and Israel. That in turn led to a practice of the abomination of the heathen. The lack of separation plunged them into immorality and idolatry. In some cases I don't think these people took the trouble to get married because the heathen of that day did not pay much attention to the formality of marriage any more than the heathen in our contemporary society pay attention to it. We are told that we live in an advanced age. We have new freedom. We are a civilized people. My friend, we are not different from the pagan peoples of Ezra's day.

For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass [[Ezra 9:2](#)].

Even the leadership was involved in this. They were all the more guilty before God, because privilege always increases responsibility. The returned remnant is in a sad, sordid, and squalid condition. Now there are several things Ezra could have done in this situation. He could have broadcasted a program on patriotism, run up the Israeli flag, displayed the Star of David, and held great rallies on patriotism. But he did not do that.

He might have delivered a withering blow against the intermarriage and immorality and idolatry by making speeches, but Ezra did not do that either. Or he could have followed another procedure: he could have formed an organization and become involved in trying to recover these couples who had gone into this immorality. That, my friend, is how we do it today. But Ezra was not familiar with our modern way of doing things. But I want you to notice what he did. It is something that we don't see much of in our day.

And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle,
and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down
astonied [[Ezra 9:3](#)].

Remember that Ezra did not arrive in his native land until about seventy-five years after the first delegation of fifty thousand led by Zerubbabel. When Ezra arrived with his delegation of two thousand, he found that the temple had been rebuilt, but not the walls of the city. And the population was in a sad and sordid condition. They had intermingled and intermarried with the heathen. Immorality and idolatry were running rampant. There was a lack of separation, and the Jews were a miserable and bedraggled lot. When all of this was brought to Ezra's attention, and he found that it was accurate, he was absolutely overwhelmed and chagrined that God's people would drop to such a low level.

Today we talk about the apostasy of the church -- at least I do. But I wonder if we are as exercised about it as we should be. Since I have retired and am on the outside looking at the condition of the church from a different view, I must confess that I would like to wash my hands of it and say, "Well, it is no affair of mine." But it is an affair of mine. And, friends, it is so easy for you and me to point an accusing finger at that which is wrong, but notice what Ezra did. He was so overwhelmed by the sin of his people that he tore his clothes and tore out his hair. Instead of beginning a tirade against them (which would have been characteristic of many people today), notice the next step Ezra took.

Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the
words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those
that had been carried away; and I sat astonied until the evening
sacrifice [[Ezra 9:4](#)].

"Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of God." I love that. Now let me pause here for just a moment. How many people really take the Word of God seriously? I think I know the fundamental church fairly well. I know many wonderful fundamentalists. They are the choicest people. They are my crowd, and I love them. However, there are many who profess to have a love for the Word of God, and they have notebooks and marked-up Bibles to prove it. The interesting thing is that their own lives are marked up and fouled up, and they are doing nothing about it. They say that they believe the Word of God, but it has no effect upon their lives whatsoever. They do not tremble at the Bible. Like the man of the world, they say, "God is love." And He is -- it is wonderful to know that God is love. But He is more than that. Our God is a holy God. He will punish sin, and that is the thing that is troubling Ezra.

Ezra sat astonished "until the evening sacrifice" because of the transgression of those who had been carried away. Ezra was shocked by this. Does this concern us? Really, today, how much are we involved? How much do we believe the Word of God? My Christian friend, it would pay you and me to go to a solitary place and ask ourselves these

questions: "Do I really believe God's Word? Do I really obey it?" The Lord Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)).

And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God [[Ezra 9:5](#)].

What does it mean to spread out your hands to God? It means that you are not concealing anything. It means when you go to God in prayer, friend, that your mind and soul stand absolutely naked before Him. Ezra went to God with his hands outspread. He was holding nothing at all back from God. The apostle Paul put it this way, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" ([1Tim. 2:8](#)). We need to remember that in our prayer lives.

Prayer Of Ezra (9:6-15)

And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens [[Ezra 9:6](#)].

Now notice what he is saying. He does not say, "For their iniquities are increased over their head, and their trespass is grown up unto the heavens." He says, "For our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."

Today it is easy to divorce yourself from the church. The church is in a bad state. I'll grant you that. But, my friend, it is not their sin; it is our sin. If the church is in apostasy, my friend, then we are in apostasy. "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standin' in the need of prayer."

Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day [[Ezra 9:7](#)].

Listen to Ezra. This is a great prayer. He knew what it was to be a captive in a foreign land. He either had been born in captivity or had been taken captive as a little boy, and he knew what it meant. That is why he trembled when he recognized that God would judge him.

My friend, there are many people today being judged of God. I could give instance after instance. Several years ago a man came to me who was eaten up with venereal disease. He said, "I thought I got by with it. Now I am going to have to die from this dirty, filthy disease." And he did. Someone says, "Well, God should have extended mercy to him." Yes, God would have extended mercy to him, but the interesting thing is that this man was guilty. Our God is a holy God and He judges sin. It is too bad that more of us don't tremble at the Word of God.

And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage [[Ezra 9:8](#)].

This is a great verse. Ezra says, "We have had just for a little space grace." The seventy years of captivity is over. God has permitted His people to return to their land, and off they go again, following the heathen -- doing the very thing that had sent them into captivity in the first place.

Ezra says, "There is just a remnant of us." These Jews obeyed enough to return to the land -- most of the Jews did not return to the land; those who did were just a remnant.

"To give us a nail in his only place" -- do you know what that "nail" is? That nail is Christ. "My anchor holds within the veil." Do you know why? Because I am nailed there. Christ was nailed on the Cross down here that I might be nailed yonder at the throne of God for eternity. Consider what [Isaiah 22:22-23](#) says, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house." So believers are nailed up there, not on a cross, but in heaven for eternity. You see, a nail is fixed in a sure place. What a wonderful illustration this is. The Jews did not lose their salvation, but they sure lost a great deal else including the blessing of God and their reward. Many of us are saved today, but we will get no reward at all.

That He "may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." I think this is a true picture of revival. The term revival is not actually a Bible word. I have always used this word from the pulpit in the popular sense, which means a spiritual upsurge, with sinners converted en masse, and a new interest in the things of the Spirit. Technically, revival means "to recover life, or vigor; return to consciousness." It refers to that which has life, then ebbs down almost to death, has not vitality, and then is revived. [Romans 14:9](#) speaks of Christ's resurrection this way: ". . . Christ both died, and rose, and revived . . ." Obviously the word revival must be confined to believers if we are going to be technical. It means that the believer is in a low spiritual condition and is brought back to vitality and power. So here in Ezra's day a real revival is going to take place.

Ezra's prayer continues.

For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem [[Ezra 9:9](#)].

How wonderful God was to these people. They confessed their sin, and God is going to bless them.

And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,

Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this [[Ezra 9:10-13](#)].

In other words, Ezra is saying, "We did not get all that was coming to us. We deserved more punishment for our sins than we received."

Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?

O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this [[Ezra 9:14-15](#)].

Only the mercy of God, the confession of sin, the sacrifice of Christ, and the grace of God could make it possible for Him to save these people, restore and revive them. God is going to do all of these things because of the prayer of Ezra. The remnant that was there will cry out to God for mercy.

When we take that position, God is ready to hear.

Chapter 10

Revival Under Ezra (10:1-44)

After this great prayer meeting, there began a movement of revival. And revival always leads to reformation. When there is true revival, you don't need a fingerprint expert to find the results.

Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore [[Ezra 10:1](#)].

An intense conviction of sin came over God's people at this particular time, and it was certainly something that was needed.

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing [[Ezra 10:2](#)].

The man Shechaniah apparently became the mouthpiece for this group of people who recognized their sin and wanted to confess. He came to Ezra and said, "We have trespassed against our God." That is a very candid acknowledgment. He continued, "We

have taken strange wives of the people of the land." That, my friend, is nailing it down and dealing with specifics. What they had done was absolutely contrary to the Law of Moses. They had not consulted in this grave matter "that which was written." In other words, they had departed from the Word of God. Now he casts himself upon the mercy of God and says, "Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing."

Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law [[Ezra 10:3](#)].

There were those who now joined in confession who likewise trembled at the commandment of God. That is, they not only read it and studied it; they let the Word of God have its way in their hearts. When the transgression was called to their attention, they confessed it. They did not attempt to rationalize, excuse, or cover over their sin. They came right out and confessed it. They did this according to the Word of God.

Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away [[Ezra 10:4-6](#)].

Breaking the Law of God was a very serious thing. They went before Him with great travail of soul. What everyone went through is rather heart-rending, but the Word of God had been transgressed and the people had to repent.

Friend, that is where revival must begin. First, we must walk in the light of God's Word. When we come to the Word of God, it brings conviction to our hearts. We see that we are coming short of the glory of God. We realize that we are openly transgressing that which God has written. When we go to Him in confession and there is real repentance, the result will be that God's children will be revived.

Today we are busy preaching repentance to a lost world. I am not sure that God is asking the lost world to repent. He is saying to the world, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . ." ([Acts 16:31](#)).

When you come to Christ as Savior, something else happens. It happened in Thessalonica. In [1Thessalonians 1:9](#) Paul says "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." "Turning to God" took priority over "turning from idols." Repentance does not precede faith. Faith goes before and repentance follows -- it follows as surely as the night follows day. If it doesn't follow, the faith is not genuine -- it isn't saving faith. Repentance is the thing that is so lacking in the church today. Have you ever

noticed that in the Bible God asks the church to repent? In the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in the Book of Revelation God asks all but two of them to repent. God was talking to believers, not to unsaved people.

Personally, I do not agree with these people who are constantly asking the mayor, or governor, or the president to declare a day of prayer. They say, "Let's have a national day of prayer. We need prayer." Oh, my friend, what are you talking about? I cannot believe that Ezra sent out word to the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites that they were invited to a great day of prayer. Let's face it -- America is a pagan nation. Believers are a minority. This is a day when every minority is being heard except the Bible-believers. I think one could organize a rally of a host of people in our nation for a day of prayer. But what good would it do? God is saying to the lost, "Come to Me and be saved through Jesus Christ." He is saying to His church, "Repent. Come back to Me. Come out of your coldness and indifference." The thing that we need today is revival, and a revival will not come without repentance among believers. In Ezra's day God's people were no longer indifferent, you see; but in our day there is indifference in the church.

Lyman Abbot made this statement years ago, "When I was a boy, I heard my father say that if by some miracle God would change every cold, indifferent Christian into ten blatant infidels, the church might well celebrate a day of thanksgiving and praise." The trouble with the church today is that it is filled with cold, indifferent church members -- perhaps many of them are not even saved. If revival comes, friend, you are going to see this indifferent crowd either come over on the Lord's side or else they will make it very clear that they belong to the devil.

Ezra went to God in genuine repentance and others are following suit.

And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away [[Ezra 10:7-8](#)].

They were making a real line of separation. They are under the Mosaic Law. In the church today I don't believe you could force the issue as they are doing here. They are removing all of the chaff that they possibly can from the good wheat. It would take about "three days" to come from any section in that land, and this proclamation was directed to all those who had come out of the Babylonian captivity, who had returned to rebuild the city, the walls, and the temple. They were to come together for a time of spiritual refreshing, but repentance must precede it. Those who would not come because they felt that things were not being done the way they wanted them done, or had some other objection, were to be cast out of the congregation.

The church needs housecleaning today. I don't mean taking from the church roll the names of the members who can't be located either. What the average church needs to do

is get rid of some of the members they can locate -- those who need to repent but will not repent.

Bitterness today is like quinine in a barrel of water. It doesn't take much to make the water bitter. I remember when I was a boy my mother would always tell me when I cut up a chicken, "Be careful and don't break the gall bladder. You'll ruin the whole chicken if you do." She was right. You could spoil the entire fowl if you broke the gall bladder. God wants to get rid of that gall bladder of bitterness in His church. For instance, [Hebrews 12:15](#) says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Just a few complainers and critics in the church can absolutely stifle any spiritual movement. Oh, how many lives have been wrecked by bitterness!

Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.

And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives [[Ezra 10:9-11](#)].

In other words, don't just be a hearer of the Word of God but be a doer of the Word also.

We are hearing a great deal today about the need for action in the church, but what the church rally needs is to get cleaned up. There needs to be confession. Even a lack of love needs to be confessed. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" ([John 13:35](#)).

Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do [[Ezra 10:12](#)].

What Ezra asked these people to do was a bitter pill to swallow. I am confident that there was a great wrenching of the heart and a great agony of the soul as these people separated themselves from their loved ones.

It is interesting that while they were gathered together quite a rainstorm came up.

But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing [[Ezra 10:13](#)].

A rainstorm came up and everybody wanted to scatter. Now Ezra had a whole lot of sense. He said, "We don't want to stand out here in all of this rain, especially because of the women and children. Instead of doing this in a slipshod manner, what we want to do is come back another day and do this thing right."

Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us [[Ezra 10:14](#)].

Ezra wanted things to be done in an orderly way, and this is what they did.

And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass [[Ezra 10:19](#)].

The offering mentioned speaks of the fact that the people are united as one. They are united in this tremendous effort to set things right with God.

Following this verse is a list of those who agreed to put away their foreign wives. They entered into a solemn agreement and pledged to do it.

All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children [[Ezra 10:44](#)].

This verse tells a sad story, does it not? The sins of the fathers will be visited on the children. We see here just how thoroughly this separation was to be carried out. Ezra was God's man for the hour. For this generation, at least, he helped preserve the testimony of the Jews for the fulfillment of God's plan.

Bibliography

(Recommended for Further Study)

Darby, J. N. Synopsis of the Books of the Bible. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.

Dennett, Edward. Ezra and Nehemiah. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.

Gaebelein, Arno C. The Annotated Bible. 1917. Reprint. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1970.

Gray, James M. Synthetic Bible Studies. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1906.

Ironside, H. A. Notes on the Book of Ezra. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.

Jensen, Irving L. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: A Self-Study Guide. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1970.

Kelly, William. Lectures on Ezra and Nehemiah. Addison, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.

Laney, J. Carl. Ezra and Nehemiah. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1982.

Luck, G. Coleman. Ezra and Nehemiah. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1961.

Sauer, Erich. The Dawn of World Redemption. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951. (An excellent Old Testament survey.)

Scroggie, W. Graham. The Unfolding Drama of Redemption. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970. (An excellent survey and outline of the Old Testament.)

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Handbook. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966. (A concise commentary on the entire Bible.)

Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol. 1. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1981. (A fine summary of each paragraph. Highly recommended.)